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SUBJECT: PORTUGAL QUESTIONS ON RESETTLING CUBAN MIGRANTS

Classified By: POL/ECON COUNSELOR RICHARD REITER, FOR 1.4 B, D.

¶1. (C) DCM and Pol/Econ Counselor met January 9 with Rui Macieira, Deputy for Security Issues to Portuguese MFA PolDir Nuno Brito. Portuguese President Cavaco Silva announced at UNGA last September that Portugal has doubled the number of asylum-seekers it would accept annually, and we wished to explore whether this would create an opening for accepting Cuban migrants. We also sought to clarify what appeared to be institutional confusion among Portuguese ministries with overlapping responsibility for the issue.

¶2. (C) Macieira explained that Cavaco Silva's UNGA announcement had been misinterpreted: Portugal is not doubling its refugee number from 30 to 60 next year, but rather had already doubled it from 15 to 30 last year. These thirty are dedicated to UNHCR cases. Apart from those thirty, asylum-seekers may make their claims in two ways: by requesting asylum at a Portuguese port of entry; or by making a prima facie case at a Portuguese consulate in order to obtain a humanitarian visa for the purpose of coming to Portugal and filing a formal claim. The claim must be filed by the individual claimant, and no institution or government can file it on their behalf. The Portuguese Interior Ministry seeks input from the MFA and makes decisions on each of these individual cases. If the request is approved, the claimant obtains either a two-year or five-year residency permit (depending on whether they partially or fully meet the refugee criteria) as well as resettlement assistance. The thirty individuals accepted via UNHCR channels have an easier bureaucratic road, with some of the steps being waived, Macieira explained. The number of refugees accepted outside of the thirty UNHCR cases is "in the low hundreds".

¶3. (C) As we explained the USG interest in securing resettlement of Cuban migrants at Guantanamo, Macieira did not (as per usual Portuguese practice) offer a pessimistic assessment of the likelihood of Lisbon accepting them, but rather asked for more detailed information to inform GOP thinking. Specifically, he asked a) for more detail on the individual cases that Portugal might be asked to consider; b) whether their cases had already been reviewed by UNHCR (if so, what happened; if not, why not); and c) what sort of travel documents/arrangements were in place when Spain accepted Cuban migrants last year. Post would greatly appreciate responses to these questions that we can share with the GOP. We were pleasantly surprised by Macieira's tone and his interest in continuing this discussion.

STEPHENSON